

NSC BRIEFING

26 August 1958

LAOS

- I. Laotian relations with the Communist World have broadened in the past week.
 - A. On 19 August, Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma departed for a "courtesy" visit to Peiping.
 - B. His trip began only 9 days after he had reached "agreement in principle" with the Communist-directed Pathet Lao for the reunification of the country.
- II. Prior to his Peiping pilgrimage, Souvanna repeatedly assured both US and British officials that he would neither make political commitments to the Chinese Communists nor accept Chinese economic aid.
 - A. However, the "joint Sino-Laotian communique", signed on 25 August, is at variance with these assurances to us.
 1. It reaffirms Laotian adherence to a policy of "peace and neutrality" (no change).
 2. It also reaffirms the premier's previous statements that Laos will refrain from joining any military alliances "as long as its security is not menaced," and will not permit the establishment of foreign military bases on its territory "other than provided by the Geneva agreement (no change). (Under this, the French may maintain two bases, with a total garrison of 3,500: at present the French maintain only one base, at Seno, with a strength of 2,150).

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- B. The communique then states further that the "two governments... agree to develop their economic and cultural relations."

This is a change.

III. In a subsequent speech, Souvanna spelled out the reason for his switch in stand.

- A. He declared that he was "deeply moved" by Chinese offers of economic aid, and that he had requested Peiping to send experts to his country to make a first-hand investigation and draw up concrete proposals to help Laos fulfill its five-year plan.

- B. In discussing military alliances in general, moreover, the premier specifically singled out SEATO with the comment: "we cannot subscribe to SEATO; an action which has the effect of being a political commitment to his Chinese hosts."

IV. From Peiping, the Laotian premier has now moved on to a 48-hour visit to Hanoi where he is being given red carpet treatment by his Communist Viet Minh neighbors.

- A. Souvanna has indicated that he wishes to raise with the Viet Minh such delicate matters as the withdrawal of its cadres from Laos and cessation of its material support for the Pathet rebels.

- B. However, his past performance in dealing with Communists, suggests that he will be either unwilling or unable to resist pressure for closer relations with North Vietnam.

V. Meanwhile, negotiation of the heart of the Royal Government's actual settlement with the rebel Pathets--the details of integrating Pathet forces into the Royal army and reestablishing Royal control over the two "lost" northern provinces (Sam Neua and Phong Saly)--is about to begin.

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- A. The Pathets--in order to insure themselves against possible government "bad faith" at least until their political position is established--are expected to press for a settlement that leaves them in de facto control of their troops and territory.
- B. As an illustration of the differences to be thrashed out is the contrast between the two positions on army integration.
 - 1. The Royal Laotian chief of staff plans to determine the number of Pathet Lao troops to be integrated into the Royal army on the basis of the number of "modern" weapons turned in; the new troops, moreover, are to be subject to strict screening and eventually dispersed throughout regular Royal units.
- C. The Pathets, in contrast, have stated that their terms for integration require that their troops continue to maintain security in the two northern provinces "under Government control".
- D. In the course of these detailed negotiations, the Pathets undoubtedly will emphasize the fact that they have the solid support of Hanoi, Peiping and Moscow and intimate that it would be unwise for the Royal government to contemplate any "double cross."

VI. Pathet participation in a coalition Laos government is another unresolved question.

- A. It is possible that some Pathet leader may be brought into the Royal government prior to the promised "supplementary" elections (to fill 21 new parliamentary seats) which are expected next spring.

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2. It is also possible that the "dark horse" among the Laotian Royal half-brothers—Prince Petsarath—will be brought back from self-exile in Thailand to preside over this coalition regime.

VII. Meanwhile, we have evidence that the Pathets are attempting to expand and improve their organization throughout Laos in preparation for future over political activity.

- A. The rebels reorganized their united front organization early this year, and are reported to have recruited ~~1~~ 400 cadres during March for subversive work.

1. The Pathet ability to win votes will be tested in next spring's "supplementary" elections.
2. Some observers feel the rebels stand a good chance of winning as many as ten of the sixty parliament seats.

- B. In any event, once the settlement has been achieved, the Pathets will be operating as a legal political party, in a good position both to exploit the considerable number of opportunists now sitting in parliament and to play upon the rivalry and disunity that already exists among Laotian non-Communist political leaders.

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29 August 1956

LAOS

- I. Laotian relations with the Communist World have broadened in the past week.
 - A. On 19 August, Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma departed for an 8-day "courtesy" visit to Peiping.
 - B. His trip began only 9 days after he had reached "agreement in principle" with the Communist-directed Pathet Lao for the reunification of the country.
- II. Prior to his Peiping pilgrimage, Souvanna repeatedly assured both US and British officials that he would neither make "political commitments" to the Chinese Communists nor accept Chinese economic aid.

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A. However, both the text of the "joint Sino-Laotian communique", signed on 25 August, and the tenor of Souvanna's remarks at a subsequent press conference have proved to be at variance with these assurances to us.

1. The communique reaffirms Laotian adherence to a policy of "peace and neutrality" (no change).
2. It also reaffirms the Premier's previous statements that Laos will refrain from joining any military alliances "as long as its security is not menaced," and will not permit the establishment of foreign military bases on its territory "other than provided by the Geneva agreement" (no change).

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/Under the Geneva agreement, the French may maintain two bases in Laos, with a total garrison of 3,500: at present the French maintain only one base, at Seno, with a strength of 2,150

B. However, the communique then states that the "two governments... agree to develop their economic and cultural relations."

This is a change.

III. In his Peiping press conference, Souvanna went even further.

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- A. In discussing military alliances in general, the premier specifically singled out SEATO with the comment: "we cannot subscribe to SEATO", an action which was in effect a "political commitment" to his Chinese hosts.
- B. Spelling out his switch in stand on economic relations, Souvanna declared that he was "deeply moved" by Chinese offers of aid, and that he had requested Peiping to send "experts" to his country. These "experts" will make a first-hand investigation and draw up concrete proposals to help Laos fulfill its five-year plan.
- IV. From Peiping, the Laotian premier went on to a 48-hour visit to Hanoi where he has been given the red-carpet treatment by his Communist Viet Minh neighbors.

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A. Souvanna has indicated that he wished to raise with the Viet Minh such delicate matters as the withdrawal of its cadres from Laos and cessation of its material support for the Pathets rebels.

B. However, his past performance in dealing with Communists suggests that he will be either unwilling or unable to resist pressure for closer relations with North Vietnam.

EXTRA CARDSON
HANOI STATEMENT

V. Meanwhile, negotiation of the heart of the Royal Government's actual settlement with the rebel Pathets--the details of integrating Pathet forces into the Royal army, reimposing Royal control over the two "lost" northern provinces (Sam Neua and Phong Saly), and Pathet participation in a coalition government--is about to begin.

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- A. We have evidence that the Pathets are expanding and improving their organization throughout Laos in preparation for future overt political activity.
- B. In any event, once the settlement has been finalized, the Pathets will be in a strong position.
 - 1. Militarily, they will have a number of their indoctrinated troops "seeded" into the Royal army.
 - 2. Politically, they will be operating as a legal party, able both to work with the opportunists elements already sitting in the Laotian parliament and to play upon the rivalry and disunity that exists among Laotian non-Communist political leaders.

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30 AUGUST 1956

ADD LAOS--VIET-LAOTIAN "JOINT STATEMENT"

Laotian Premier Souvanna's second venture in communique-drafting was issued in Hanoi on 29 August, at the end of his 48-hour visit there.

A so-called "joint statement" by Souvanna and Pham Van Dong, the Viet Minh premier, is very close in tone to the Souvanna-Chou "joint communique" issued at Peiping on 25 August.

- A Closest parallel is a clause in the Hanoi statement providing that both agree to "the necessity of establishing economic and cultural relations, and of exchanging friendly delegations."
- B The "exchanging of friendly delegations" was subsequently defined by Souvanna as meaning the establishment of diplomatic relations.

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so in the "joint statement" is a Viet Minh appeal to Viet-
namese residing in Laos to "respect the law, habits and customs"
of Laos. Taken at face value, this could hamstring the Pathet
as a "brains trust", composed of Viet Minh cadres.
So a quid pro quo for this "friendly" Viet Minh gesture, Souvanna
and the concept of a settlement in Vietnam "strictly" in
line with the Geneva Agreement. A strict implementation
of an agreement on the unification of Vietnam would, of
course, be to the disadvantage of South Vietnam.